DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 177 780 EC 121 159

AUTHOR Stoi, Margaret
TITLE Eliminating Problem Behaviors with Positive Controls.
PUB DATE Jun 79
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the ABA Conference (June 19, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Aggression; *Behavior Change; *Behavior Problems; Childhood; *Emotionally Disturbed; Exceptional Child Research; *Positive Reinforcement

ABSTRACT

A teacher describes her efforts to deal with an 11-year-old severely emotionally impaired girl in a classroom with other acting out, aggressive students. The girl's behavior problems included breaking, tearing, spitting, swearing, running, and sexual aggression. A positive reinforcement system was found to be primarily responsible for success in altering her behavior. Controls used were verbal and physical -- praise, hugs, pats, and food reinforcers. Restructuring the environment and the daily schedule was also found to work. (Author/CI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Margaret Stec
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED177780

ELIMINATING PROBLEM BEHAVIORS WITH POSITIVE CONTROLS

I took over teaching a class of seven severely emotionally impaired upper elementary school students in the second year of a county SEI program. Six of these students had been together the previous year and had had the opportunity to know each other and each other's behavior patterns. They had not had consistent classroom management techniques as the regular teacher resigned mid-year and the position subbed.

The class was composed of ten through thirteen year olds operating academically from nursery school level to third grade. There were five boys and two girls. Most importantly, there were five acting-out students with aggressive behaviors. One student was extremely hyperactive, three with a great degree of impulsivity as well as distractability and one autistic-like student. The biggest challenge in the room, however, was an eleven year old girl with at least thirteen negative behaviors, which began approximately 10:00 A.M. each day. There were when graphed, at least a hundred incidents daily.

My school year began in pandomonium and after spending two days attempting to evaluate the academic and behavioral programming needs, decided that most time, of necessity, would have to be spent eliminating incidents of negative behaviors, especially the acting-out, which consisted of a student swearing, shouting, taunting, causing another student to become irritated and to do the same, often ending in physical confrontation, wherein it became necessary to intervene to eliminate five students joining in the fracas.

There were three adults--myself and two paraprofessionals in the room. Although this was a good adult-child ratio, none of the students were able to work independently at the time and even if the more academically functional students were given work that could be done independently, they would become involved in negative behaviors with or against the other students. If group work was attempted, problems arose from the mere physical proximity of another student. It was difficult to maintain an academic schedule as when a student or students became involved in acting out incidents, it would require two of the adults to intervene and leave the others to handle and

EC 121159

maintain some sense of order until the acting out students had been quieted. This was not easily accomplished, especially because of the extreme volatility of the remaining students. Thus, not only did we have an extremely difficult acting-out girl, but we had a classroom of acting-out aggressives, who enjoyed and took advantage of the problems she caused. It was necessary to establish a program to contain her and also to simultaneously deal with getting our hyperactive boy to sit and attend, instead of swear and fight with two of the other students, who whould provoke him, our autistic, not to imitate the behaviours of the others, especially the negatives, the other girl to do her work without kicking, swearing, screaming and provoking everyone else.

Our main problem was a girl, who had a history of state institutions and foster homes. Her current foster placement, however, had lasted four years. The parents were in constant contact with us and had managed over the years and with the aid of a behavioralist, who came into their home, to have developed means of controlling her behavior, even though, they too, experienced periods of negative dealings. Her academic background consisted of placement in a special program in the regular school, placement in a mentally impaired program. She was transferred to the emotionally impaired program because of her behaviors, especially running through the building and poking at the eyes of the other handicapped students. Academically, she had little skills. She could only trace some letters or make circles independently. She had little letter recognition. When verballizing, she used one or two word phrases.

In her first year in the S.E.I. program a variety of interventions were tried, some dealing with overcorrection or satiation, some negative, but she spent most of the time in a one-to-one situation, often isolated from the rest of the group in another room or confined in a desk bolted to the floor.

Her first days with me saw her come to school eager to work. This cooperative attitude would last approximately 45 minutes and then the negative behaviors would begin. She would usually tear her work or prefe.able the work of one of the other students, especially our extremely hyperactive boy, who became easily upset and would use foul language

as well as becoming physically abusive to her or others. She would also run to the bulletin board and tear any work there. This would be followed by other negatives. We listed her negative behaviors, when requesting the services of the behavioralist and they were:

Destructive--BREAKING glass, ceramics, planters,, anything especially cups and glasses ON SIGHT!
TEARING paper, bulletin boards, worksheets
KNOCKING OVER her desk, chairs, any containers, other furniture.
RIPPING OFF jewelry, necklaces, earrings, pins, glasses scarves.
SPILLING all liquids, paints, water, kool aid, coffee.

Verbal-- swearing
provoking other by swearing, teasing
spitting--increased when excited

Sexual-- aggressiveness,"handling" private parts of female bodies, while using foul or suggestive language

Inability to attend--remain seated or working without adult near.

Physical-- running from activities, from adults, especially out-of-doors
AGGRESSION, pinching, biting, pushing, hitting, kicking, poking at eyes with finger or sharp objects (pencil, crayon, scissors), self-abuse, picking at self or banging head

Lack of appropriate peer interaction--or relationships, demanded adult attention, one-to-one.

These behaviors usually began after one hour in school and increased as the day continued.

When the negative behaviors occured, if she was restrained by the adult physically holding, the negative behaviors increased and accelerated. If ignored, they also increased!

We tried to deal with the situation in the room, but the contamination effect on four other acting out aggressives was too difficult to contain. We would remove her across the hall to the quiet room but she would enjoy the one-to-oneness of that situation and it became a back

and forth process. We had requested the assistance of the behavioralist but until she would come, we began to establish our own program.

Since we wanted to increase her positive attending time and avoid the beginning of the negative chain of behaviors, we decided to reinforce ANY positive or near-positive behavior.

We thought this method would be effective for two reasons--1) the particular background of the child (state institution, foster homes), suggested that these were attention-seeking behaviors; so that if we attended to the behaviors we wanted to occur and ignored as much as possible, keeping in mind the acting out potential of the other four students, we might eliminate the tearing and the other attention-seeking behaviors that followed; 2) the child always came to school ready to work, so there was at least an hour in the morning where there could be many instances of positive reinforcement and attention.

Our primary reinforcers were to be positive signs from adults and peers--smiles, words, touches, pats, holding her hand, hugs, sitting on our lap, ex. "Good work (with pat or hug), go show Ms.Julion and Jerry your work." We followed the verbal and physical reinforcer with small food reinforcers, as another sign of positive behavior (being good in her language). We did this almost continuously at the beginning, always giving her some positive when on task.

It appeared at times, that her behaviors were compulsive--the sight of anything glass would be cause for breakage (she could enter a room and immediately know if there were cups or plants), paper hanging would be ripped down. To insure as many opportunities of verbal and physical praise, we restructured the class to eliminate, as much as possible, glass, an overabundance of "hanging" things, paper and plants. As another guarantee, we would also have the person working with her (we had her on a one-to-one at all times, with the adult in charge changing at frequent intervals, to insure generalization of behavior and a "break" for the adult), we had her hands close or held in a non-restraining fashion, so that she could not impulsively go into a negative behavior. Later in the year we found that re-directing her hands to some appropriate action to be most effective. If she was reaching out threateningly, we might ask her to fold her hands, to get a game, to cut, etc.

When we managed tc lengthen her positive time to near lunch, we would additionally share parts of our lunch with her always verbally pairing the food with "I like how you're sitting,""I like how quiet you are," and a touch. We, also, began to have class lunches to improve peer and adult interactions. Sharing food, often used as a reinforcer at any level, seemed a good way of establishing positive interaction within the group, who could not at any time sit next to each other. We also began to develop a "group" discussion by pairing the talk with a fruit break. Those who sat and talked appropriately, could have a slice of fruit and a recess. We would also allow any student who wished to sit on our laps. We often didn't have enough laps.

We would ignore her negative behaviors whenever possible. The other children in the room, however, often gave the negative attention she was seeking and so this procedure was not as effective as it could be. We did, however, praise, give treats or points (we had begun a token system for the others) for ignoring, but this was often not incentive enough to miss an opportunity to act out.

When the behavioralist was assigned to the room, we had with our program, eliminated many instants of negative behaviors, lengthened her day to beyond lunch and most importantly established ourselves as positive reinforcers to her and to the others.

Data was taken and behaviors targeted were: hitting, breaking, tearing, swearing, sexual aggression and running from activities. Time samples indicated that the inappropriate behaviors were most apparant after lunch and during activities, which were aversive to her, i.e. science and math. Baselines were taken on the time she attended to each activity and Lotto and a pre-reading program, "Here's Howie" were the two activities she would attend to for the longest periods--a maximum of five to six minutes. It was also noted that inappropriate behaviors began when she could direct the attention of the adult. This she did by engaging them in conversation, usually pertaining to other activities or would leave the task and want to get her folder, her treat cup, etc. Another event that would stimulate her would be the adult leaving her to attend to someone else or to get to other materials.

She would also attempt to set up her own contingencies for good behavior. This she still attempts--"I be good girl, if_____." Our response is "You'll be a good girl!"

Because there was a positive correlation between the number of times she left an activity and her chain of undesirable behaviors, a very structured full academic program on a one-to-one was implemented. Activities changed every ten to fifteen minutes. The schedule was:

9:00 - 9:15	Trace name and letter of alphabet
9:15 - 9:30	Visual Disc. Activity--Pegs, Cubes, Patterning
9:30 - 9:45	Color, cut, paste letter and picture
9:45 -10:00	Sight work--letter recognition and word building
10:00 -10:15	Alphabet sounds - "Here's Howie"
10:15 -10:25	Language Experience Word Book
10:25 -10:30	Calisthenics
10:30 -10:50	Group Discussion and Fruit Break
10:50 -11:15	Lav & Recess (Structured game with adult)
11:15 -11:30	Peabody Language Lesson
11:30 -12:00	Lunch
12:00 -12:20	Quiet Time - Listening to a Story
12:20 -12:30	Math Worksheet--Tactile Number & Counting Experience
12:30	Art or Movie (Weds. & Fri.) Bowling (Mon.)
1:00 - 1:15	Recess (Structured with adult)
1:15 - 1:30	Coloring Sheet or Science Experience
1:30 - 1:45	Lotto
1:45	Prepare for gym
1:50 - 2:20	Gym
	Thursday - 10:00 to 12:30 Swim

There were times when her negative behavior chain occured and interventions did not work. We experienced a set-back when the behavioralist entered the room. After evaluation, targeted behaviors of breaking, tearing, hitting were handled with a quiet time procedure established in the room so that she would be aware of the positive activities, rewards, and interactions, occuring between the adults and other students. A quiet chair was set up with a desk in front of it where she would be confined with a timer set for two minutes so that she could see the

timer, but not reach it, meanwhile being ignored. It was also decided that sexual aggression to adults would be ignored, as well as swearing. After a while she would stop the negative behavior after a minute or two of ignoring. I found it very useful when it was necessary to ignore a behavior that really bothered me, to concentrate on reciting in my mind the Star Spangled Banner or the words to a particular song, so that I could maintain a distracted appearance. I became so adept at this technique that she would often say, "Ms. Stoi, you dead?".

As she progressed and began to value the adults, the verbal and physical reinforcers, the food reinforcers were gradually eliminated. She has improved over the past two years. She will not break OUR glass cups, but bring them to us to be put away. She has, however, broken them in other places. She can be timed-out by witholding conversation and verbal praise, until she is on task again--"I can't talk to you until you are sitting (or) your mess is cleaned up." Recently, she has been told to sit down for some behavior and instructed to watch the clock on the wall until the big hand is on ____ and then return herself to the work area and has done this.

Periodically, she reverts to her old behavior patterns to see if the rules are still the same. Before Easter she refused to work in the afternoon and tore the worksheet and tossed it on the floor. She was told she could not continue activities until the sheet was pasted. She was placed on the floor next to the torn work with a jar of white paste. I sat next to her reading a magazine. She proceeded to spread the paste on my slacks, arms and in my hair for about ten minutes, while I ignored. She eventually asked if I would help her paste the work together and I sat on the floor with her and she was able to return to task and activities. When leaving the room, with other schoolmates on the bus, she still shows some negatives--especially spitting. Generalization to outside home and classroom has not occurred.

I feel though she has made marked improvement behaviorally and academically. She can be verbally reprimanded by us and will lesten, values our attention, our praise and hugs. She can sit by herself for short periods and keep busy. She has improved in gross and fine motor skills, can recognize upper and lower case letters, print some letters

independently, cut, has 10 sight words, draw figures and engage in conversation, showing development of thought processes and now uses complete sentences. She has also begun to value a point system of earning checks to be cashed in for candy and prizes.

I feel that the positive reinforcement system is primarily responsible for our success. Restructuring the environment and daily schedule helped. Other interventions we have attempted to use worked for short periods and then had to be discarded or modified, as she would manipulate the situation and begin to enjoy the intervention.

Very important to the success was the perseverance, endurance and determination of my paraprofessionls, Marilyn and Barb, who worked with her and I these two years. It is not easy to ignore spit on the face and sexual aggression. We found it necessary to build into our day relaxation activities and exercises geared for us--we began to play music we liked during quiet time, for example. Music has become an important part of our schedule and the students have also become accustomed to listening to, relaxing by and responding to particular recordings.

Most important, we always tried to maintain a pleasant attitude and atmosphere in the room and handle situations with humor, even when at times, the room was falling apart around us.

Margaret Stoi,
Upper Elementary Teacher
Severely Emotionally Impaired
Robinwood School, Macomb County

Presentation for ABA Conference
June 19, 1979